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**A research on the influence of the Official Schools of Language
curriculum on the materials used in the English class**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the changes the 2007 curriculum generated in Official Schools of Aragon, paying specific attention to the use of different materials in class.

It is obviously very difficult and time consuming to evaluate the strategies and methodologies being used in the different Schools of Aragon. Thousands of observation hours would be necessary in order to depict the situation. Nevertheless, we can focus on a more manageable aspect of teaching, as the materials in use, to get some information in a shorter time. Resources are one of the foundations of teaching, so, the selection and use of a given resource will deeply affect the teaching and learning process.

From this perspective, a direct relationship can be established between the materials which are being used for a given English course and the process of teaching and learning. That is, a grammar-based material will result, most probably, in a grammar-based teaching, built upon traditional strategies and methodologies. Resources with a root in real communication situations will easily result in a more communicative approach.

Thus, a study of the different materials used and their purpose might let us draw some conclusions on the real effect the new curriculum has had on the teaching of English in Official Schools of Languages in Aragon.

Justification and research questions

I am personally interested in didactic resources and how and why they are used; I am a book lover and a frantic Internet user, always in search of new titles and resources. On the other hand, the general situation in Aragon is complicated and interesting. I regard materials as a key stone in teaching, their use being absolutely crucial to the teaching and learning process. That is why I find this topic very attractive and significant.

I also find the timing very appropriate. It is four years since the implementation of the curricula, a fair amount of time to start evaluating how it is exactly working.

There is not much literature about the use of materials for teaching English in Spain. Some very interesting works on selecting and adapting materials are to be found, but I had no notice of any research dealing with the study of the materials being used in a given educational stage in Spain. Being among the first researchers in this field (though local) is both a challenge and a pleasure.

It is not uncommon that the publication of a curriculum for a given educational stage does not produce a tangible impact in the way teaching is carried out in that stage

and, in the case of Official Schools of Languages, there are some hints which may lead us to think that the impact is not that big:

- . The books used in the different schools nowadays are the same as those used before 2007

- . The books used in the different schools for each level are not aligned; that is, vary in level and difficulty from a school to another.

These two hints are, in my view, a good starting point for a research. A curriculum is set to produce different results from those of the previous one; to achieve those results new methodological strategies are to be implemented and it seems logical to think that new resources are to be used within the framework created.

It is also logical to believe that the use of materials in class has a deep impact on the teaching and learning process and, thus, can be a good source of information about the real impact the curriculum has had on the teaching of English in Official Schools of Language in Aragon.

The main hypothesis I intent to prove with this study is the real influence the curriculum has had in the Official Schools of Languages in regard to the use of materials and, therefore, in regard to the teaching and learning of English.

Once I have studied the general pedagogical implications of the 2007-2008 curricula and have described the different solutions carried out (again in terms of the published materials used) in the Schools of Aragon, I propose some questions:

- . Has the Official Language School curriculum had an important influence on the resources used in the English class?

- . Have the teachers changed significantly their way of teaching through different sets of materials?

- . Are the publishing companies offering enough and valuable materials to teachers?

These questions will be answered throughout this research

Setting

In 2007, the new curricula for the basic and intermediate levels of the Official Schools of languages in Spain were issued (Real Orden. 3 Mayo, 2007). In the following year, the curriculum for the advanced level was also published (Real Orden, 3 Mayo 2008).

The curricula came to set a new approach towards language teaching and learning, taking as a starting point the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), in such a way that:

“Los currículos establecidos por la presente orden responden a los planteamientos del Marco común de referencia para el aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la

evaluación de lenguas y, desde esta perspectiva, comportan un enfoque esencialmente comunicativo... ”

Regarding the teaching action and the activities and tasks to be offered to the students, the curricula state:

“Las tareas de aprendizaje, diseñadas a partir de los objetivos específicos que se pretenden alcanzar ha de ser comunicativas para ofrecer al alumno adulto la oportunidad de utilizar el idioma tal como lo haría en situaciones reales de comunicación...”

The objectives of the curricula are set into four different categories, which are aligned to the four skills to be taught (listening, reading, writing and speaking). There is no mention to the fifth skill (spoken interaction) yet.

The different schools, in the design of their learning units, will decide on the materials to be used for each level and also on the methodology to be adopted in class.

This new curricula were issued to substitute the ones published in 1989, in which grammar played a central role and communication was, somehow, neglected.

A summary can be set throughout a chart:

<i>Last curriculum</i>	<i>New curricula</i>
1989	2007/2008
Five levels	Six levels
Two cycles	Three cycles
Grammar-based approach	Communication-based approach
No reference to CEF	CEF as foundation
Typically getting to C1+ in five years	Certification of B2 after six years
Exams created in each school	External common exams for B1 and B2

Figure 1. Comparison of the main characteristics of 1989 and 2007/2008 curricula

Significance and limitations

The topic of this research is, obviously, local, the setting is constricted to Aragon and, more specifically, to the Official School where I was assigned for my practicum. I regard this study as a small first step towards a more comprehensive and exhaustive study of how English is now taught in our schools.

I took as a starting point the general situation in Aragon regarding the text books the schools are using but constricted my research on the reasons why the teachers are selecting, adapting and using materials in the Official School where I spent my teaching practice period.

Background

In 2008, the new curricula for the Official Schools of Languages were in a sort of beta version. The main idea about them was that a new way of teaching was required, one based on real and functional communication in which the students were to have a central role. Thus, a big effort was required from the teachers and the educational institutions to adapt themselves to the new situation. Of course, the publishing companies had to play an important role in the process of adaptation, in creating new materials and resources capable of responding to the new curricula's requirements.

Regarding course books, in 2008, the best-selling series in Aragon was 'New English File', by Oxford University Press, with a 70% market share. It is a teacher-friendly series, full of different resources for teachers and with a solid pronunciation syllabus. It is regarded as a communicative text, although direct, traditional grammar work is more than obvious along the different levels of the series.

Before 2007, a typical selection of books in any Official School would be like the following:

<i>Official School course</i>	<i>Text/level</i>
First	New English File Elementary (OUP) A1
Second	New English File Pre-intermediate (OUP) A2
Third	New English File Intermediate (OUP) B1
Fourth	New English File Upper-Intermediate (OUP) B2
Fifth	Inside-out Advanced (Macmillan) C1

Figure 2: typical selection of English text books before 2008

The traditional levels of books, created by the publishers (elementary, pre-intermediate, etc...) were perfectly aligned to the first to fifth course design of the schools; moreover, their methodology was also aligned to that of the 1989 curriculum.

In 2008 everything changed. The new system was formed by six levels, in three cycles, with the following correspondence to the CEF levels of proficiency:

<i>Official School Course</i>	<i>CEF level</i>	<i>Text books level</i>
1 st basic	A1	Elementary
2 nd basic	A2	Pre-intermediate
1 st intermediate	B1	Intermediate
2 nd intermediate	B1+	Not available ¹
1 st advanced	B2	Upper Intermediate
2 nd advanced	B2+	Not available

Figure 3: correspondence of Official school's levels and those of CEF

So, the traditional lists of books were no longer adequate. It seemed that the books which were traditionally used in Official Schools were too grammar-centred and not as communicative as necessary; on the other hand, the different published series consisted on five levels, and not six.

¹ New English File Intermediate Plus is available and corresponds to a B1+ level, but it is made of a mixture of the old editions of English File Intermediate and Upper-intermediate, published in 2001 and 2002.

The publisher's sales departments were working hard in order to know the expectations the teachers would have and how to fulfil them.

In 2012 the situation is surprising. The textbooks the schools are using are the same; New English File has the same market share (about 70%) and the publishing companies have not been forced to publish new series or even new levels for those already present in their catalogues.

A compilation of the text books lists of the Official Schools in Aragon (see appendix 1 for the complete information) clearly shows how different strategies are being used regarding course books. Those lists are public and can be easily found in the schools' web sites.

We can state a few solid facts:

- . Text books are still widely in use. The 2007 curricula have not made the teachers stop using books. Only in a course in Teruel (2nd advanced) teachers are not using a text book.

- . There are not new series with an important market share. New English File is still the dominating title in Aragon. There are not significant changes regarding new series or new publishing companies.

- . The new edition of series like English File (OUP), Inside Out (Heineman), Total English (Pearson) or Face to Face (CUP) are not a substantial change from the corresponding level; structure, methodology, level of difficulty, etc... are almost the same.

- . The choice of the text book level is now very varied. Even three different book's levels can be used for the same course in different schools.

<i>Curriculum level</i>	<i>Text book and level</i>
1 st basic	New English File Elementary (OUP)
2 nd basic	New English File Pre-intermediate (OUP)
1 st intermediate	New English File Intermediate (OUP)
2 nd intermediate	New English File Intermediate + (OUP)
1 st advanced	New English File Upper Intermediate (OUP)
2 nd advanced	New English File Advanced (OUP)

Figure 4: books used in the Official School of Languages of Ejea

<i>Curriculum level</i>	<i>Text book and level</i>
1 st basic	New English File Elementary (OUP)
2 nd basic	English Unlimited Elementary (CUP)
1 st intermediate	New English File Intermediate (OUP)
2 nd intermediate	Outcomes Intermediate (HEINLE)
1 st advanced	New English File Upper Intermediate (OUP) / Speak-out Upper Intermediate (LONGMAN)
2 nd advanced	Clockwise Advanced (OUP)

Figure 5: books used in the Official School of languages of Utebo

<i>Curriculum level</i>	<i>Text book and level</i>
1 st basic	New English File Beginner (OUP)
2 nd basic	New English File Elementary (OUP)
1 st intermediate	Speak-out Pre-intermediate (LONGMAN)
2 nd intermediate	New English File Intermediate (OUP)
1 st advanced	New English File Advanced (OUP)
2 nd advanced	No text

Figure 6: books used in the Official School of languages of Teruel

As can be seen in the previous charts, different solutions have been reached to answer to the same situation. It is, as I mentioned, very surprising to check the huge differences among the schools, especially if we take into account that, at the end of each cycle, an external examination is set for the certification of the CEF's levels. That is, the students will take the same exams but, if we direct our attention to text books, with the help of very different tools.

One might have expected that, facing an official examination, which is the same for every school of Aragon and is external, the materials would be of the same level. Of course there are differences among the schools, in size, location, number and age of teachers and students, etc... but that difference does not result in the choice of diverse titles but in the choice of diverse levels.

The situation depicted in this introduction leads us to be curious about the use of different resources for different situations. When a traditional course book level is not taught (pre-intermediate in Utebo, advanced in Teruel), are some teacher-produced materials being prepared to fill the gap? When a level is repeated (elementary and intermediate in Utebo, intermediate and intermediate + in Ejea), are some new materials ready to give the students more varied inputs?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For the design of this research and of the questionnaires and interview to teachers, the reading of the following written works has been of great importance:

Evaluating and selecting EFL materials, Cunningsworth, A. (1984, Heineman Educational Books) has been a valuable inspiration throughout this research. Cunningsworth begins noticing the importance of the materials in English teaching, especially course books and the selection of the most appropriate ones. For selecting the best resources the teachers must pay attention to some important aspects such as the selection and grading of language items, motivational issues, support materials, etc... The author ends offering a complete checklist for evaluating and selecting EFL materials.

That checklist is exhaustive. It covers the main aspects a teacher must take into account when selecting or adapting a given material and offers an overall evaluation at the end, where a summary of the analysis can be set, paying attention to weak and strong points in the book, the learning situation it offers, and the degree in which its objectives are fulfilled.

Brian Tomlison's *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* (2003, London, Continuum) is also devoted to the selection, adaptation and development of different materials and offers, in my view, a more modern perspective on the topic. It consists of five sections:

The first part is Data collection and materials development. This section deals with the importance of the students and the need to pay attention to the students' needs when creating materials. In the second section, the process of materials writing, Tomlison explains that the writing of materials is a dynamic process, which should be always under revision and change; moreover, it must be cooperative work (students and teachers must collaborate) and focus on the capacity of motivation of the materials.

The third section is devoted to the process of materials evaluation, giving more importance to the published materials and the relationship between teachers and commercial publishers. The electronic delivery of materials is the topic for the fourth section and deals with the use of the web 2.0 (blogs, Facebook, wikis, etc...) in the language classroom and the changes this use can bring to it.

Finally, in the section Ideas for materials development, Tomlison tries to give some instructions and orientations to teachers who want to create their own materials. He is fond of a kinesthetic perspective instead of a plain visual one; he believes that TPR can be more effective than a mere visual input and encourages teachers to prepare materials in this line.

Tim Dalby also offers some interesting ideas about the selection and use of text books in his paper *Adapting Your Course Book: Becoming Skilled in the Art of Manipulation* (Jenjou University, 2009 in TESOL review 1, 145-166). He indicates some of the advantages of course books (they give guidance, save time, provide a starting point for further activities, provide structure and are expected by the learners)

and some of their drawbacks (they are straitjackets, are poorly designed, contain boring or irrelevant topics, are culturally removed and present unauthentic language).

For the selection of materials, we will pay attention to the method, appearance, teacher-friendliness, extras, interest of the contents, the level of difficulty and the skills taught. Manipulation of published materials is recommended, by means of adding, deleting, editing or replacing. Some practical ideas are also given.

For the structure and development of the research itself, Nunan's Research Methods in Language Learning (1992, Cambridge University Press) has been an enormous help. Being my first individual research and, being a complex and delicate matter under investigation, Nunan's reflections on the different approaches, tools and strategies a researcher can use were crucial. The structure of this research is based on the one presented in his book.

Nunan presents 4 steps in the preparatory stages of a research: formulating the general question, focusing the question, deciding on an objective and designing a research plan. I, being such an inexperienced researcher, tried to follow these steps carefully in order to have a solid base for my work.

3. DESIGN

The curriculum requirements

As it was mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the curriculum does not impose the use of any kind of materials for any of the levels of the Official Schools of Languages. The language department is responsible for making the syllabus, which will include the objectives and contents and their timing, the decisions about methodology and materials and the procedures and tools for evaluation.

Thus, a communicative approach shall be implemented in class, offering real communicative situations to the students and paying attention to the development of the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences:

“Las competencias lingüísticas, la sociolingüística y la pragmática, son recursos primordiales para la comunicación y el alumno habrá de adquirirlas a través de actividades y tareas diseñadas de manera que dichas competencias se pongan en uso”.

The objectives for each Language are devoted to the four skills. There are general and specific objectives for oral comprehension, oral production and interaction, reading comprehension and written production and interaction.

The contents are presented in separated categories although:

“En situaciones reales de comunicación todas las destrezas se activan simultáneamente”.

Summing up, the Official Schools of Languages' curricula for English are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and take communication as the starting point and the objective of the teaching and learning process. The teacher must offer real communicative situations through which the students will have the chance to practice all the aspects of the linguistic competence towards a more communication-oriented use of English.

Published and authentic materials

When I refer to published materials I mean those generated by traditional publishers, whether they are printed or digital materials, especially those contained within the series the teacher is using. For example, a video clip from New English File Pre-intermediate will be considered published material if the teacher is using that precise book.

As it was already stated, few changes can be observed in the published materials in the last five or even ten years: the same series are the best-selling ones and the same titles (or the new editions for the same titles) are present in the schools.

It is interesting to pay attention to what the books say about themselves, that is, the mottos and key selling points highlighted in brochures and webpages devoted to them.

New English File series motto is: “The course that gets your students thinking”. The highlighted points in it are a great support for teachers and students (the Study link system), grammar and vocabulary banks a fantastic approach to pronunciation and loads of extra materials and support for the teachers.

Heinemann gives Straightforward the motto “Teaching made simple” and affirms that Straightforward is an integrated skills series with a transparent structure, making it an easy-to-use course for students and teachers alike. Also, the teacher will find different guides on different teaching areas (guide to teach grammar, to role plays, to translation and to CEF).

“Get ready for life in English” is the catchy slogan for Face to Face, by Cambridge University Press. The publisher offers a website with resources for teachers. Wordlists, placement tests and CEF materials (with skills maps per level) can be easily found. The interactive versions of the books are given important prominence within the series.

According to Pearson ELT, Speakout is a comprehensive general English course that helps adult learners gain confidence in all skill areas using authentic materials from the BBC. It has a wide range of support material for a variety of teaching situations. Along with the series the teachers will find help in the teaching tips videos (with ideas to use in class), BBC podcasts are a great source of real material both for teachers and students.

So the two main features which are emphasized are support materials for teachers and students and a great amount of real resources which will be the base for real communication activities.

I will pay close attention to these two concepts with the help of the questionnaire. I consider it necessary to find out whether the teachers are selecting the textbooks because they like their amount and quality of communicative tasks or because of issues related to coherence, structure, friendliness and easiness of use, etc...

Authentic materials are mentioned as such in almost every publisher's piece of marketing and, although some real resources can be found in textbooks (extracts of films, songs, podcasts, etc...), most of the contents are simulated materials; that is, real materials which have undergone a process of adaptation. It is especially clear with reading texts (usually working only on target language, trying not to incorporate unknown items) and in listening tasks (again language tends to be far from natural).

The use of authentic texts, then, is traditionally away from the use of course books or other published materials. The advantages are clear: they offer more natural language, they are closer to reality and they are updated (since they are usually taken from the Internet). Authentic materials allow a teacher to talk about the latest news in class using some interesting support materials taken, for instance, from a blog.

Authentic materials are closer to the student's interests and are, therefore, more stimulating and motivating for them. They even let the teachers involve students in the choosing of topics or contents. When using a course book, the contents are fixed and the topics set, giving little space to changes; on the other hand, the use of authentic materials might let a group of students decide on the topic they want to work on and even select some of the resources to be used.

The most obvious disadvantage of authentic materials is time. The search for an appropriate and motivating resource for our English class can be a time consuming task; the Internet is so vast that sometimes it is quite hard to select a simple item. Another issue to take into account is the reliability of authentic materials, meaning that teacher-generated materials are not tested, they are yet to prove they are worthy while published materials offer a contrasted piece of work.

English as a second language materials are those found in web pages devoted to the teaching and learning of English. They are usually grouped according to a grammatical point or a semantic field. In those web sites a teacher can easily find exercises for any level of proficiency, about almost any topic and working any of the five skills.

It is even possible to download whole learning units from those sites. The disadvantages are a poor layout (published materials are, obviously, much more attractive) and the difficulty for adaptation (pdf is the normal format).

The kind of materials to be found in the typical ESL web page is artificial; it usually starts with or is supported by an authentic piece but is clearly adapted for linguistic or other purposes.

Summing up, we can draw a chart to describe the main characteristics of course books, authentic and simulated materials:

<i>Text books</i>	<i>Authentic Materials</i>	<i>Simulated Materials</i>
Target language	Natural language	Target language
Focus on form	Focus on content	Focus on form
Great layout	Great layout	Poor layout (usually)
Teacher friendly	Difficult to manage	Teacher friendly
Easy to plan and use	Time consuming	Medium effort required
No updated content	Updated content	Updated content
Universal topics	Local topics	Universal topics

Figure 7: a comparison of text book, authentic and simulated materials

As can be seen in the chart, for a communication-based English class, authentic materials seem to be the most appropriate, since they offer a natural input of language supported by a good layout and the topics and contents chosen can be close to the student's interests, generating motivation. With simulated and, especially, with published materials, there is a more controlled input in terms of language and topics can be easily old-fashioned; of course, they are easier to manage and less time consuming.

Subjects

The subjects for this research were the six teachers of the English Department of the Official School of Languages where I did my teaching practice. Unfortunately, only four of them could fill in the questionnaire proposed. Informal interviews were carried out both within the department and individually with the six English teachers.

Regarding the students of the school, they are in a peculiar position in relation to the resources used in class. First of all, they do not participate in the decisions taken (only the teachers select materials) so their role is passive in the planning stage. When they are in class, they seem to be contented with anything that they are offered, whether the input is communicative or more grammar-based, with a strong visual support or without it.

This position is given, in my view, because of the way they have been taught English. They have had no contact with tasks or projects and therefore cannot compare those to the activities they usually do in class.

A clear example of this situation is the role play activities they are given. Role plays are standard communicative activities in which one or more students take a role to contrast it with the roles of one or more peers. The typical role play activities in the English class are very closed, in such a way that no freedom is allowed for the students, who have to stick to very fixed roles and are asked to speak just for display, without a clear objective.

After some consideration, I decided not to give a questionnaire to the students. I believe their answers would not be relevant for this research because their lack of experience with different materials from those they are used to.

Materials

A questionnaire for teachers was the main tool used for this paper (see appendix 2). It was filled in by four teachers, each teaching two different levels. It consists of 20 questions divided into two parts:

The first 10 questions are devoted to published materials. Topics such as the selection of the text book, the degree of satisfaction with it, where its strong and weak points are and how the teacher adapts its contents are dealt here.

The last 10 questions are centred on teachers-generated materials. Questions about the frequency, the objectives, the use of ICT's, etc... will be present in this second part of the questionnaire.

Obviously, the objective of the questionnaire is to find out whether the teachers are now offering different materials to adapt their teaching style and resources to the requirements of the curriculum. Have they really changed the way they teach? Are their objectives different? Is that change reflected on the selection and use of different resources?

All these questions are a delicate matter. I had the chance to have some informal interviews with the English teachers and they tended to be careful in their answers. They were fairly reluctant to answer direct questions about their methodology and the type of lessons or material they use in class.

That is why I had to be very careful with the items of the questionnaire. I wanted all the teachers to fill it and, of course, making them uncomfortable was not a good basis.

It is here where lays the main difficulty of this research: teaching is a personal activity, based on personal beliefs and actions in which subjectivity plays an absolutely important role. The most open minded teacher can feel offended by too many questions about his or her daily work, especially when those questions are related, not to the students, but to what they are doing exactly in class.

To try to convert that subjectivity into some measurable data has been quite demanding, from the planning stage, through the designing of the research tools, to the data collection.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The questionnaire was answered by four out of six teachers in Utebo. Since each of the teachers is using two different textbooks (for two different levels) a total of eight questionnaires were responded.

Many of the questions are related to personal points of view on different issues related to the selection and use both of published and teachers-produced materials so it is not surprising to find a wide variety of answers to the most open questions such as “What do you like the most of the book you use?”. When designing the questionnaire, I devised some open questions in order to give room to possible opinions not included among the options of the more closed ones.

Thus, in the questionnaire, there is a combination of open and closed questions searching for both objective and subjective ideas about the materials and resources the teachers are using. This variety makes it difficult to establish a quantification of results, but some conclusions can be drawn from some of the questions and answers:

First part of the questionnaire: textbooks

Question 1. Why did you choose the book you are using? (You can tick more than one)

There are a total of 18 answers, which shows the variety of opinions among the teachers. The option “it is well aligned with my teaching style” is only marked twice. It seems that the different books offer just one teaching style, with small variations or even that the teaching style is not such a personal but more a standard concept.

Question 2. The level of the textbook you chose:

Out of 8 answers, 5 are “it is perfect for the course I am teaching” and the other 3 are “there is not a traditional level which is appropriate for the course”.

It seems that some school’s levels (as we saw previously) are perfectly covered by traditional publisher’s and for others (especially 2nd intermediate) the teachers must be contented with what they can find in the different catalogues, even if those books are not the most appropriate ones.

It is quite surprising to detect such a passive attitude towards the publishing companies, which have not been forced to the publication of new series to cover the Official School’s needs or, at least, to the publication of new levels to complete the existing series.

Question 3. Your books vs. the curriculum vs. your goals.

A majority of answers (six out of eight) are not as convincing as one might have expected. Most of the teachers declare that the books they are using are “often aligned with the curriculum and their goals”. Only 2 regard them as perfectly aligned.

Again, the lack of changes in textbooks from those used before the 2007 curriculum is apparent. It seems obvious that a series (English File, for instance) which covered the 1989 curriculum cannot, without deep changes in methodology and contents, cover satisfactorily the 2007 requirements.

Question 7. Are you satisfied with the book?

Most of the opinions are “it is very good”. Outcomes Intermediate receives bad opinions (“it is a bluff” and “not so much”), It seems that, except with Outcomes Intermediate, the teachers are very satisfied with the books they have chosen.

Question 8. What does the book consistently offer? (You can tick more than one)

The options “Coherent learning units”, “good topics” and “good progression of difficulty” are the most voted. As Dalby explains in his paper, two of the advantages of using a text book are structure and guidance. These answers show what the teachers are looking for in a course book: a good solid structure which guarantees a good progression of the difficulty and a clear guidance both to teachers and students.

On the other hand the options “loads of communicative activities” and “good pronunciation practice” only get two and one vote respectively. We saw how, except for one book, the teachers are quite satisfied with the books they use; now it seems that the main reasons for that satisfaction are structure and coherence whereas communicative skills or pronunciation pass almost unmentioned.

Question 9. What do you miss in your book? (You can tick more than one)

There are not many answers to this question: the teachers do not miss much in their books. Again we can see that they are quite satisfied with the published materials they use.

Summary of the first part of the questionnaire

The conclusions we draw at this point are:

- . When selecting a course book, teaching styles are not taken into account. Are all the teachers teaching the same way? Is there a standardized teaching?

- . Teachers regard the level of the book as perfect or non-existent. That is, there are times when a given level of a book fits the requirements of the school course but, sometimes, there is not an appropriate textbook in the market to cover the course’s requirements. This fact does not make the teachers give up using a book or try to make the publishing companies produce a new level for a series.

- . Books are, generally, only often aligned with the curriculum. This is not what we can find in other stages of the educational system (such as primary or secondary education, where the course books are always perfectly aligned with the curricula).

- . Teachers are very contented with the books (except for a title, which seems not to be appropriate). This high degree of satisfaction comes from the structure, the

coherence and the topics the textbooks offer, and not (as one may expect) from communication tasks, pronunciation work, etc...

Second part of the questionnaire: teachers-generated materials and ICT

Question 11: Do you offer your own teacher-generated materials to your students?

5 answers say “always” and 3 “very often”. It is clear that teachers-produced materials are offered frequently.

Question 12: Are they adapted from books or taken and adapted from other sources?

The whole 8 answers say “half and half”. To get materials from other textbooks is a good way to save time, since adaptations are fewer than those necessary from non-specific ESL resources.

Question 13: What are the objectives of those materials? (You can tick more than one)

We can find the most varied answers here but it is shocking that the least selected is “to make different things (not those of the book)”. So it seems that concepts like support and extension are behind teachers-produced materials and not ideas like variety, innovation or creativity.

In fact, the two most popular options are “to cover book’s lacks” and “to give the students more support”; that is, to keep on working on the same topics and contents the book is offering.

Question 14: What kind of materials you design more often? (You can tick more than one)

Listening tasks are the most popular among the teachers-generated materials. There seem to be two main reasons: the students need much support and practice for improving their listening skills and the listening tasks of the books are often too few and too easy.

Tasks are not considered at all. They are just not a part of English teaching in the Official School of Languages.

Question 15: Do your resources work?

They do work. 7 answers are “most of the times” and 1 is “always”. One could say that teacher made materials work as well as the published ones.

Question 17: Do you use the Interactive Whiteboard?

The E-beam interactive whiteboards (installed in every classroom of the school) are widely used. The use of them for every lesson is almost the unanimous answer to this question.

Question 19: How have ICT influenced your development of teacher made materials?

6 out of 8 answers say “now I make the same amount of materials than before”. ICT have changed the layout of the teacher made materials; that is, now they are presented on the whiteboards instead of on paper.

Question 20: Before and after the new curriculum. Please mark true or false

The teachers affirm they offer more communicative activities than before but also say that the textbooks contain more of that kind of exercises. They say they prepare the same amount of teacher made materials than before de 2007 curricula and the materials are quite similar to those offered previously,

Summary to the second part of the questionnaire

Some conclusions from this second part of the questionnaire are:

- . Teacher made materials form a basic part of the English teaching in the Official School of Languages of Utebo. All the teachers prepare and offer that type of resources as a main part of their methodology.

- . The sources for teacher made materials are, in half of the cases, published books (others than the one in use for the course). This fact shows the importance of course books in the English class.

- . The objectives for teacher-produced materials are very varied (from grammar to speaking activities) but the aims are basically to extend the book's contents or to give support to the learners. Their objective rarely is to implement different activities from those the books offer.

- . Listening tasks are the most popular among the ones prepared by teachers, since the learners need much practice to improve. On the other hand, tasks are never offered; they simply are not a part of English teaching in Utebo.

- . Teacher made materials work well; the degree of satisfaction about them is similar to that of the published materials.

- . ICTS and especially interactive whiteboards are extensively used in the English classroom. Nevertheless, the contents and objectives of the materials have not changed much, only the support and layout seem to be new.

- . More communicative activities are being offered now, with the new curricula. The source for them, however, seems to be the text books, whether the one in use for the course or others used as support.

- . Teachers are preparing the same amount of teachers made materials to cover the same aims.

Results

The results of this research must be regarded taking into account its main characteristics. It is a very constricted investigation, depicting the situation of just one school and with only six teachers as subject so the results will have to be contrasted to those obtained in other schools in order to have more reliable ideas about the topic under research. Nevertheless, there are some concepts which we can extract from the investigation that I reckon are interesting:

. The use of text books is massive in the Official Schools of Aragon. This fact has not changed with the enacting of the 2007 curriculum.

. There have not been deep changes in course books. Some books have been in the catalogues for decades and did not disappear in 2007. New editions of popular series were published (English File, Inside Out, Total English, etc...) but they did not contain deep changes in methodology or strategies. Some more communication tasks can be found, but they are still very grammar-centred resources.

. The publishers have not made any effort to adapt their series to the curricula or to publish new titles to cover their requirements. There are courses (especially second year of the intermediate level) for which there is not a single appropriate course book available.

. This situation has not stopped the teachers from the use of text books; neither has it made them prepare different teacher made materials.

. When designing teacher made materials, the teacher's main aims are to reinforce weak parts of the books or to give the learners support for the most difficult parts. Again, the course book plays a central role.

. ICT do not bring a deep change in methods or resources. The same materials are presented in a different way, keeping objectives and philosophy.

5. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The 2007-2008 curricula have not produced a great change in the materials and resources used for the teaching of English in the Official School of Languages under study. In spite that not many new publications have been issued and that there are huge gaps in the publishers' catalogues, teachers are still fond of the same books and putting the same methodologies and strategies into practice.

This sort of immobility regarding materials can be seen as a reflection of a parallel process on immobility in teaching. The question is: can new methods, approaches and strategies be implemented through the use of the same materials? If a new way of teaching is demanded by the curriculum, isn't it logical to start making changes in the materials one is using?

Of course, it is risky to establish a direct and fixed relationship between the materials and the methodology of an English class. It is obvious that the same resource can be used in innumerable ways and will, therefore, give different results. The teacher will make a personal use of a given piece of input according to their teaching style and objectives. Nevertheless, I believe that the materials are to set the guidelines to the teaching and learning process and, so, the selection of some materials or other will significantly affect the way English is taught.

And, in that perspective, it is surprising to see both sides of the situation. On the one hand, teachers keep on relying on the same published materials than before and, although they affirm that now they have more communicative activities than before the 2007 curricula, they have not changed deeply in terms of methodology or the language they offer.

On the other hand, teacher-generated materials now seem to be quite similar to those generated before the curricula were issued. Their main objective is to cover or complement those areas of the books the teachers find weaker; they are rarely seen as a source for different activities or tasks. In fact, tasks and projects (which can be regarded as the purest communication-based activities to be implemented) are not even considered as part of classroom dynamics.

The reasons for this lack of change in the methods for English teaching might be the topic for a new research. I personally think (and I could observe it personally) that some misconceptions are held, such as the belief that pair work is cooperative and communicative per se, or the installed idea that grammar must be taught extensively before the learners can start speaking the language.

Teacher training comes instantly to mind. Unfortunately, training is not as reachable as it should be among Official School of Languages teachers. There is not a specific offer of instruction for teachers of adults issued by any government department making it very difficult for the teachers to keep updated in pedagogical and other matters. It is quite common to hear teachers affirm that they used to do games, open role plays, drama, songs, etc... but now they are not offering that kind of activities to the learners. I think they tend to get tired and come back to the teacher friendly book, which is solid, coherent, practical and reliable but that lacks many things that only teachers can provide.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The curricula have not made a difference in the materials used in English teaching or in the objectives the teachers have when selecting or creating them. This can be regarded as a sign that no changes are being developed in the way English is taught; that is; one can think that grammar is still the centre of the teaching and learning process and communication is still reduced in importance.

The publishing companies have not felt the necessity to publish new text books to cover the requirements of the new curricula. They have seen how teachers are still buying their books, in spite of the fact that sometimes they are not appropriate for a given course.

The new six-level system has been introduced in different ways across the schools of Aragon regarding text books. A variety of course book levels can be found for the same CEF and Official School course, which is quite surprising if we take into account the fact that the certification exams are the same for every school.

English teaching is driven by text books. As Cunningsworth points: “Course books are good servants but poor masters”. The teacher must not permit the book to set the objectives, let alone allow “teaching the course book” become the objective.

It is worrying to check how a curriculum has little effect over the way a subject is taught, at least the 2007-2008 curricula have had little or no effect over the materials used for teaching. It is even more upsetting to see how other curricula (Primary or Secondary Education) are not having the effect they were expected to. What is exactly happening? Why are there not significant changes in education when a new law is introduced?

Of course, the answers to these questions are not easy but, regarding materials, I think the main reason for such a small impact lays in the use of course books. The books are very well made, they are reliable and comprehensive; they offer loads of extra materials and support both for students and teachers. They are full of different activities to practice target language and they come along many digital resources to make teaching more memorable. They do not offer, though, many opportunities for practicing real natural language. Simulated materials support simulated situations in which the students have to play a simulated role and, very often, speak, listen, read or write for the sake of doing it, without a personal purpose. It is a display of language.

Meaningful learning must part from the students’ interests and background and must give them the chance to participate actively in the process of learning, becoming the centre of the process. A book cannot offer that kind of situation. To start with, topics and objectives are set previously so no attention is paid to the interests of the learners; books do not let students participate in the planning of a learning unit and do not let them be the centre of the process of teaching and learning, since they tend to occupy such a big amount of the class time.

7. PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This has been my first attempt to become a researcher and I found it incredibly demanding.

It has been especially tough for me to devise the questionnaire I used for this research. As I mentioned, I felt the teachers were a bit disturbed by some questions I asked them (even before I started my research) about the books they were using and the teacher made materials they prepared for their classes.

I guess teaching is a deeply personal activity and one can feel anxious when a researcher (especially a novel one) tries to investigate the way one is doing it. This fact made the designing of the questionnaire a challenging job. In fact, I feel some questions did not get the results I expected and, instead of getting a direct answer, were somehow avoided, getting just superficial information.

Once I thought the questionnaire was ready, everything started to flow a little bit easier but, at the time of collecting the data, I realized that personal questions lead to personal answers in such a way that some questions had such a variety of answers that they were not effective.

I think that my design was insufficient. This research needed some observation time in order to be more precise and efficient. I only had the chance to observe my practicum tutor and not the rest of the subjects, so I tried not to be affected by that observation.

Should I have the chance to keep on working on this research, I would like to devise an observation chart to find out exactly how many teacher-generated and published materials are used and which are the objectives set for each type of resource. Some observation time in class of some subjects could serve as a contrast to the questionnaire and as a more objective tool.

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